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MEMORIAL ADDRESS

BY

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ON THE

BATTLEFIELD OF GETTYSBURG

MAY 30, 1908.

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My Friends and
Fellow Citizens of the Republic:

In the last days of June, 1863, the Confederate forces, raiding on the North and East and advancing from the West, were recalled and concentrated towards this spot under the pressure of the Union forces coming up from the South. On the afternoon of June 30th, the weary and dusty troopers of Buford's vanguard rode through the village and threw out their picket lines in readiness to touch the advance from the West of the Army of Northern Virginia.

On the morning of July 1st, at nine o'clock, an officer of another staff came clattering up to Buford and was sharply questioned and ordered to return immediately to his command. Just as he protested—"Why, what's the matter, General?"

—the far-off sound of a single cannon shot was heard, Buford's signal to his skirmishers to open on the enemy, and Buford said, "*That's the matter!*" The battle of Gettysburg had begun. At the close of that pitiless and terrible July day, the Union forces, repulsed but not beaten, fell back to Cemetery Ridge, and the brave antagonists waited for the morrow and fought, and again waited for the morrow and fought with the result that all the world knows.

Let us leave the battle now, leave the recital of its details of valor to the tongues of those whose proud memories of their past achievements qualify and entitle them to speak. Let us rather seek to find the real reason for Gettysburg; discover, if possible, its fundamental cause; find what indeed was the matter; why it was necessary that Gettysburg should be; what law had the

American people broken that they should receive this baptism of fraternal blood and how such crises in National life are to be averted.

We know that the laws of the material universe, if observed, so govern and control matter that it continues to develop until it results in perfection of form and strength, but if those laws are disturbed destruction follows:

We also know that in the spiritual world the laws promulgated by the Creator, which are to govern men in this world, if observed by man, either consciously or unconsciously, make him to grow in spirit and in righteousness.

So it is with the nations of the earth. They are subject to ethical laws, the observance of which means life for the nation, and the rejection of which means death.

As in the natural world there is continual war between the evoluting forces of nature and the opposed forces of dissolution, and as in the spiritual world there is continually strife between the spiritual laws and the forces of evil, so there is in the history of every nation this continual strife and war, which ultimately must reach a crisis where, face to face, good and evil, justice and injustice must fight until either the right prevails or evil survives.

Nations have passed through such crises and have survived or perished, just as moral laws have prevailed or been overthrown.

Sometimes men are conscious of the real nature of the struggle in which they are engaged. They realize just what forces are contending. They appreciate the exact issue involved, follow the causal sequence of events and can foresee the nature and effect of the result. At other

times, "God moving in a mysterious way His wonders to perform," hides from the mind and vision of men a real apprehension of the causes and consequences of their most vital acts.

"Man proposes, but God disposes," and His dispositions are controlled by His own immutable and inexorable laws and inscrutable purposes.

Speaking of Napoleon and Waterloo, Victor Hugo says:

> "Was it possible that Napoleon should win this battle? We answer —no! Why? Because of Wellington? Because of Blucher? No! Because of God.
>
> "For Bonaparte to be conqueror at Waterloo was not in the law of the nineteenth century. Another series of facts were preparing in which Na-

poleon had no place. The ill will of events had long been announced.

"It was time that this vast man should fall.

"The excessive weight of this man in human destiny disturbed the equilibrium. This individual counted of himself alone more than the universe besides. These plethoras of all human vitality concentrated in a single head, the world mounting to the brain of one man would be fatal to civilization if they should endure. The moment had come for incorruptible supreme equity to look to it. Probably the principles and elements upon which regular gravitations in the moral order as well as in the material depend, began to murmur. Reeking blood, overcrowded cemeteries, weeping mothers —these are formidable pleaders. When

the earth is suffering from a surcharge there are mysterious moanings from the deeps which the heavens hear.

"Napoleon had been impeached before the Infinite and his fall was decreed.

"He vexed God.

"Waterloo is not a battle; it is the change of front of the universe."

And so at the battle of Waterloo, Napoleon on the one side in opposition to the incorruptible and supreme equity must go down before the great ethical law, which destroyed him because by his ambition and his power he was disturbing the equilibrium of the moral world. Napoleon and the despotic empire were crushed to liberalize monarchy and to establish constitutional order through the counter-revolution which followed Waterloo.

Just such a crisis forty-four years ago came into the life of this nation upon this field, and it was just as inevitable and necessary as Waterloo.

Our forefathers had set forth in the Declaration of Independence in 1776 that:

> "All men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Fighting for the establishment of this principle the Revolutionists were successful and the nation was born.

In 1787, forgetting this principle of universal liberty, the founders and the people of this nation, while they declared in the Preamble to their Constitution that their purpose was to secure the "blessings of

liberty to ourselves and our posterity," recognized and permitted the enslavement of human beings.

The germ of disunion was in the organic law and the nation for three quarters of a century continued to oppose and thwart the eternal laws of justice, the incorruptible and supreme equity, until Providence caused the righteous laws of freedom to prevail, and in the crisis of this field of battle eternal justice met, overcame and destroyed the evil principle of slavery so that the nation survived, pure and cleansed of its disease.

The soldiers of the Union met the forces of disunion for almost two years on many battlefields and because the guiding minds of the nation were endeavoring to save the nation and at the same time save the favored institution of those who were in rebellion against the nation, God so pre-

vented the triumph of the Union arms that the cause of the Union was well nigh lost.

Man in his weakness thought that this government, founded on the eternal principle of freedom to all, could exist half free and half slave.

But the Almighty, guiding the destinies of the nation, frustrated the weak plans of man, and as the God of battles brought those entrusted with the nation's life to see that the nation could only survive wholly free. And so Abraham Lincoln, realizing that the time had come to bow to the Supreme will—to that Divine power which had been so ordering the affairs of this nation that the crisis must come, issued the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring that all should be free.

Then the nation took on new life, then her warriors, "thrice armed because they had their quarrel just," inspired by

their holy cause, that of union in which every man was free, fought on the side of eternal justice and supreme equity and became an invincible host.

What inspired the four score and ten thousand men of the Union Army to meet in the dreadful shock of battle the hosts of disunion?

What inspired them to rush into the "imminent deadly breach?" What sustained them as they met the onrush of the enemy? What but that love of country that made it glorious to die, that love of liberty that made the patriot's grave his country's shrine?

And so there died upon this field of battle many thousand defenders of the Union—many thousand patriots—many thousand heroes, who offered up their lives a willing sacrifice that this country might be in fact, as in theory, wholly free.

The great victory was won. Eternal justice prevailed. Supreme equity reigned.

Today we survey this field and see with clarified vision all that its tragedies meant. We see the Union saved, the nation established upon the immovable rock of freedom.

The penalty for the transgression of the divine law of human liberty was paid by the nation as a whole because the whole nation was the transgressor. Victory and peace came only when it was certain that the preservation of the Union meant universal freedom. Responsibility for the primary causes of the nation's woes makes her whole people partners in the resultant griefs and glories. No loyal heart discriminates today between the graves of those who died that the supreme equity of freedom should prevail and no geographical lines circumscribe the gratitude of a nation

cleansed of its original sin by the blood of its devoted sons.

Splendid and terrible were the concomitants of the mighty struggle. They were fit accessories to the stupendous issues involved.

The pomp, the glory and tragedy of war do not, however, environ every eventful and critical period in a nation's history. Liberty and justice may survive or perish amidst the scenes of peace as well as those of war. Eternal vigilance to maintain a nation's institutions is quite as important and necessary as martial valor in establishing them upon firm foundations.

It may seem at times that the overthrow of some particularly vicious manifestation of evil threatening the national life marks the ultimate victory.

This is not true. The conflict never ends. It is going on now. We are in

the ranks and shadowy hosts and forces are contending all about us. On one side or the other of these bloodless battles all of us must be. We are either supinely submitting to, or courageously combatting, insidious assaults upon our national life. Armageddon is a present fight which will be waged until the end of this world and then will culminate. Athens and Greece won the glories of Salamis and Marathon and perished miserably and enslaved because Hellenism no longer meant vigilance, patriotism and righteousness.

It may be said with truth that for a nation the dangers of peace may be worse than the dangers of war and this is peculiarly true of our nation.

Our governmental system has secured certain advantages which could not have been obtained without making it complex, and for that reason more liable to become

disarranged than are simple democracies and simple monarchies or autocracies.

If we are to retain these advantages and prevent dangerous disarrangements of our plan we must jealously guard its distinctive characteristics against the natural tendency towards their elimination and a reversion to the rejected but simpler types. The simplest form of government is absolute autocracy and it is the worst. All power is centred in one man, his will is the supreme law, he rules with undisputed sway.

Our governmental plan was constructed so as to resemble in a way the solar system where the finger of God spins the planets in perpetual harmony; but our system is the work of human wisdom and must depend upon human wisdom for its success.

Sometimes a portion of the people strong by reason of their number or by

reason of their zeal and activity, and interested in the accomplishment of laudable aims become impatient and restive under the checks and balances and boundaries which control and harmonize our system and may therefore oppose what they want through the methods they propose.

Recently this tendency seems to me to have threatened seriously to disturb the just relations between the State and Federal governments. Impatient of the difficulties and delays which must attend the action of separate States in the accomplishment of their objects, some of the people have seemed to feel that by an assumption of Federal power, or by ignoring State power, their aims could be speedily and fully obtained.

But the genius of our Constitution, the supreme equity of our form of government, the balance wheel of our system is that

each of the dual governments shall keep within its own sphere, untrammeled and uncontrolled by the other.

Let us guard against dangerous encroachments upon this system; let us stand courageously, persistently and eternally by our ancient rights.

In this way shall we show our gratitude to those who perished here and preserve the principles for which they died.

If this Union is to survive it must be maintained as constituted or as modified in the way provided by those who constituted it.

If it is to survive it is just as necessary, now and always, that wisdom, vigilance and courage should abide in the halls of legislation, the chambers of judicial decision, the centers of executive power and with the dominating mass of the people as that the sons of the Union should

have bathed with their blood these fertile fields.

The strength and power of this Nation does not rest upon the fact that it is a federation of States, but that it is a Union of States, based upon a Constitution formulated by the people, adopted by the people, defended and preserved here by the people. No object is so important that we should sacrifice the very nature and glory of our system to accomplish it.

It cost us nearly a million lives, untold millions of treasure and unspeakable anguish, to prevent the States from destroying the Union created by the Constitution.

If unfortunately it should ever be necessary, it is not to be presumed that the people would not, at equal cost, prevent the Union from destroying the States. Such a crisis can only be avoided by the people themselves and by them only by

sternly rebuking and dismissing public servants who through motives of cowardly expediency, weakness of moral or mental fibre or other cause fail to stand courageously for the maintenance in their integrity of our essential rights. Wise men establish governments; brave men defend and die for them; weak, corrupt and ambitious men destroy them.

This Government is not seriously threatened by Anarchy, which is the cause espoused by the wicked, malicious and envious and by ignorance and perverted degeneracy.

Our peril is to be found in weak or insidious acquiescence by our public servants in specious demands for inroads upon the established and tried institutions of our country sometimes made in the name of reform, sometimes masquerading as justice.

The highest and most patriotic ambition you and I can entertain is to seek to understand the fundamental principles in American National life and understanding them to defend and protect them. Defend them alike against those who would narrowly restrict them and those who would destructively expand them.

The individual skirmisher out along the far-flung Union line beyond this crest served the cause as well as the commander of corps or army directing aggregate movements from headquarters. And often the private soldier has saved the day and retrieved a disaster due to a commander's folly or perversity, dying an inconspicuous hero. In that spirit of vigilance and devotion, let us serve in this army of the Union, which is always in the field. We may not be able to make our service conspicuous, we can certainly make it useful.

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